



Celebrating the dam that wasn't built

Half of Fort McDowell would have been flooded by project

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Apache Crown Dancers perform during the welcome ceremony Saturday. (Photo by Quindrea Yazzie)

Congress approved the Central Arizona Project's Orme Dam in 1968. This massive project would have flooded half of the Fort McDowell Reservation, wiping out the people's homes and crops.

The Yavapai protested that law for the next decade until it was finally abandoned in 1981.

Now the people still come together to share the value of protecting one another and standing up for the land they call home. Last weekend hundreds celebrated the 38th annual Orme Dam Victory Days on the Ft. McDowell Indian Reservation.

The celebration is a rodeo and powwow that includes traditional performances by Yellow Bird Hoop Dancers, Apache Crown Dancers and other well-known dancers.

[Yellow Bird Productions](#), [Ken and Doreen Duncan](#), from Mesa, Arizona, shared multiple traditional dances including the eagle dance, hoop dance and a community hoop dance.

Ken Duncan played the flute while his wife Doreen and his son Talon got ready for the first performance - the eagle dance.

During the welcome ceremony an elder explained how the eagle allowed the Yavapai to keep their culture and land base where their people were able to settle, said Duncan.

Talon walked to the middle of the clearing wearing an all-red outfit with feathers. He was representing the eagle.

“We decided that we should begin our dance program honoring the eagle and that is what we did. We did the eagle dance for them, said Duncan. “It was very special.”

It is important to recognize the battle that has been fought, but also the many battles Native Americans continue to fight for, said Doreen Duncan.

Her family continues to entertain people across the country and overseas to spread their traditional dances.

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Many people attend Orme Dam Victory Days to spread cultural teachings and others attend to remember their tribe's victories or their relatives,

Hiawatha Hood, a former tribal chairman, made a huge impact while protesting against the Orme Dam. He wanted to save the land, said [Sophia Sayles](#), Hood's granddaughter.

Sayles was situated among those selling artwork and jewelry. Her business, Sophia's Photo and Video, offered special event photos.

She said she is grateful for her grandfather and what he did. A family legacy.

“He is someone that I admire and look up to,” said Sayles. “If it wasn’t for the protest then we wouldn’t have a place to have a celebration or traditional events or for our people to live.”

Orme Dam Victory Days Timeline

1947 - Submission to the Secretary of the Interior

The Central Arizona Project, CAP, report was submitted to the Secretary of the Interior in December of 1947.

1948 - Submission to Congress

The CAP report was submitted to Congress.

1968 - Congress approves the Central Arizona Project

The approval included the construction of the Orme Dam at the confluence of the Salt and Verde Rivers which would provide flood control and a storage reservoir.

1981 - Abandonment

After fighting for more than a decade, the Yavapais successfully won the fight and the project was abandoned.